So far in Mr. De Wolf Hopper's musical entertainments he has been ahead of his material. In the art of graceful fooling he is a suggestive and intelligible giant, who isn't called upon to put forth the full measure of his own possibilities.

I suppose he has raked the earth for a libretto that would be worthy of him and the captivating sprite, his wife, and "El Capitan" marks the limit of musical fun in our bookmakers. It is not up to high-water mark. It is not up to Mr. De Wolf Hopper's mark. The marriage of music and merriment is like a marriage of an English clown to a French cocotte by an Alderman who is in a hurry to get to a chowder party. Mr. Sousa's clamorous and bandmaster bang does not weld easily with the feminine text. The perfume of melody is a crushed perfume, crushed by the orchestra. Humor of the fantasy order is not martial. One does not pound jokes out of a drum or set satire to a trombone.

Whenever a librettist of the up-to-date order furnishes what he thinks is the metal of a libretto, the bandmaster comes along with his hammer and beats it into gold tinsel. The moment he does, clang takes the place of intelligibility. Everybody wants to know what the chorus is singing about, but the orchestra takes good care that nothing but the rhythms and the common chords shall be heard.

It is a gala day, and everybody is marching up Broadway when Sousa leads the procession. Merriment, which ought to be a gambol, becomes a march, and Mr. De Wolf Hoppper, who generally has something to say and knows exactly how to say it, becomes a gyrating drum major.

If a librettist is capable of writing lyrics that mean something, there ought to be a Committee of Safety present at every setting of an opera to heal the blows of sound. I suspect that this inevitable accompanying fanfare of ditties, ballads and recitative is meant to sell the book of the opera. For, as I have said, if you wish to know what it all is about you must shut up your wounded ears and take to studying the words that the orchestra has trampled under its feet.

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Now, consider De Wolf Hopper a moment. He is the privileged interlocutor of the play ground. Whether he sings or talks or tumbles, he is quite sufficient if the band will not muffle him. He is one of the few comedians whose talent runs all the way down his legs without ever leaving his voice. Nobody who fools in numbers has preserved such a masculine longitude and such a boy's gayety. Only give him the chance to be heard and understood, and he will translate the feebleness of literature into the absolute fun of manner. He knows how to enunciate the vernacular. How few comic opera singers do! He never forgets his vowels; he never abuses his consonants. And even Alfred Ayres knows that he does not play hunt the slipper with his emphasis.

Very often in the jargon of these operas the humor, the satire, the application of the text hides in a word, a rhyme or a phrase, and eludes the perfunctory duffer. But how easily De Wolf Hopper hunts it out, trots it up and down and then flings it between the eyes of the dullest comprehension if you only give them the chance.

"El Capitan" would have been a much more intelligible fantasy if Mr. Sousa had not tried with martial preciseness to make it keep step to opera forms. Its book is extravaganza, its score is opera. A great deal of that which conveys needed information to the listeners is lost by singing it in a sword of brass. But what we lose in intelligibility we gain in momentum. The whole entertainment moves per saltum, as if the leader's baton were a vaulting pole; or, to speak more correctly, as if he were a lightning conductor and the French Horn were the dynamo. There are some gleams of idyllic interest in the numbers, but the cornet scorches so we can't catch up with them. The leader of the band has a pet theory that opera with love in it is like a Hamburg steak, and has to be beaten to make it tender.

All this fixes "El Capitan's" merit in ensemble. When the procession has passed we don't remember anything but the procession, but we are still keeping time with our feet. There have been sprites floating in dainty gossimer. Blue-bottled nymphs, with indistinguishable utterances, have buzzed in and out. Round-limbed girls have come and gone at the beck of the clarionet, sandalled feet have pattered and vanished, winsome faces have swirled in vortices, spun and sped away, and there remains nothing but the rhythmic thud of Sousa's marching squadron.

You see how impossible it is for a rousing band master to be dreamful and overcome us like a summer cloud by firing off war rockets. We have, so to speak, to put Mr. Sousa in the guardhouse a few moments and tell him that madrigals do not boom—it is only nominations. Sentiment does not explode. Badinage is not bravura, and merriment in fleshings is not martial.

If we could only enjoy through our eyes this menu, with the jellied Hopper in the centre a la bourdelais, while the band was kept in an adjacent gallery as they keep it at the swell cafes, to wreath softly at a safe distance through a spiced atmosphere how full would become our gusto. The eye is completely won by "El Capitan," at the very start, as it always is when youth and comeliness get into the centre of airy nothingnesses and furnish the phantasmagoria of jollity. One sees that special sprite, Mrs. De Wolf Hopper, fluttering always perilously near the flame of De Wolf Hopper himself, without being consumed. One has an irresistible impulse to take a pair of sugar tongs and save her.

But presently one sees that it is her mission to flit inextinguishably with a child's freshness—to flutter with the burble of a bobolink and the abandonment of a butterfly through all the labarynthine mazes of "El Capitan" without being scorched by Hopper or crushed by Sousa. But even Sousa knows, perhaps, that you can't smash a fragrance with a trip hammer. De Koven has tried it.

Even in the Wagner school there is among the composers a strong inclination to leave the pounding to be done by the critics.

* * *

And, speaking of fragrance, when the lilacs are growing in the dooryard, we don't do our scorching at the theatre, but under the stars. We go to the theatre to dream. De Wolf Hopper has carte blanche to furnish a summer sedative. He can take all the colors of the rainbow; all the limbs of the Mohammedan Paradise, all the odors of Cathay and all the tones of the summer woods, if he will only stand in the centre and tell us with his unmistakable voice what it is all about, for even in summer dreams there must be intelligibility. To see De Wolf Hopper in the centre of his corybante wrestling with Sousa to do this, is apt to wake us up.

Of course, if comic opera is destined to follow in the track of our monthly magazines, and we are to look at the pictures and pay no attention to the text, I don't know any publication that will flush the eye like Hopper's. His chorus is vernal. One does like a crisp salad chorus at this time of year. Your autumnal bevy, with muscles in its necks carefully painted out and its flanks run all to adipose and repose is like having corned beef served with mayonnaise sauce at the seashore.

De Wolf Hopper's chorus is always like the first dish of strawberries. Did you ever notice the inspiration, the zest, with which he hugs his own chorus. I cannot imagine any more recuperative nepenthe for a blase man than to go and see De Wolf Hopper love himself in his own chorus.

It is the saving masculine clause in the feminine fantasy, always a suggestion of virility in the centre of the stage. By and by, when Sousa gets at it, and the delirium begins, one gets a confused picture of flying limbs, enmeshed, shooting black stockings beating themselves to death against convolutions of skirts, inextricable white arms involved like cosmic macaroni, flying mists of tissue like sheets of rain with something pink and symmetrical sticking out all over—a veritable sand storm of voluptuous star dust, and De Wolf Hopper, like the garlande "El Capitan" looming up in the centre and trying to tell us what it means, as if we any longer cared.

Some day when the sprite and the nymphs and all the pulsing hypnotism of it are safely out of reach, I will read the book, and then I will tell you.

NYM CRINKLE.

A Chat with Miss Coghlan.

I saw Rose Coghlan at the Metropolitan drinking in the sound—nothing else, 'pon my honor. I have never seen her look better, and she was charmingly dressed. As Miss Coghlan, however, has forty-seven trunks of clothes stored away for future reference, there is no reason on earth why she shouldn't shine sartorially. I had a long talk with this actress, who was engaged in showing people how to enjoy promenade concerts gracefully.

"I feel happier than I have done for a long time" (no wonder she looked so well), "because I believe that I have at last secured a winner in Max O'Rell's new play. What a gamble it all is! What a speculation! We rush into big productions literally blindfolded, and we never know until afterward where we are. The bandages are removed, and—perhaps we have won, perhaps we have lost.

"Look at my production of 'Diplomacy.' It was the consensus of opinion among managers, in the Summer of 1892, when I contemplated making this revival, that I should lose heavily in every way. Theodore Moss was the only man, I think, who encouraged us. 'Get a good cast, Rose,' said he, 'and "Diplomacy" will go.' You remember the result. We packed the Star Theatre for weeks, and our business everywhere averaged about $9,000 a week."

I hate people to tell me their receipts, because I never believe them. I can't help it. Credulity is not one of my points. I suppose I looked all this, for Miss Coghlan hurried away from the subject.

"O'Rell's new play appealed to me at once," she continued, "so far as the story goes. The play complete, I have not yet read. I have faith in it, because Max is such a splendid entertainer, and his flow of language is so bewilderingly amusing. The incidents he has used in this play happened in real life. They deal with Bohemian swelldom in Paris, and if Max O'Rell doesn't know all about that, pray tell me who does?"

Miss Coghlan didn't really want to know, so I refrained from mentioning a few names that were on my lips.

"The hero and heroine," she resumed, "will be a sort of Heloise and Abelard—two artists who are devoted to one another, and who live only for themselves. Their friends are legion, but belong only to their own calling. The husband becomes suddenly rich, and from that time on there is trouble. There are some big dramatic scenes, and one real sensation. Don't imagine for a moment that I am going to be more explicit. I'm not, I assure you. It is rather dangerous to be too explicit, don't you know. I will say that the play ends happily, and that the story points an obvious moral."

I longed to ask Miss Coghlan a few questions about her clothes, because I have always been exceedingly interested in them. I have seen her wear two dresses in one act, and have felt uncomfortable when she didn't. However, I lacked the courage necessary to launch Miss Coghlan on the sea of millinery talk, and merely suggested that the question of costume must be an expensive one for her.

She agreed with me. "I was amused," she said, "at something you wrote when you criticized my production of 'Madame.' I can't recall the exact words, but I remember you expressed satisfaction at not seeing a line on the programme advertising the name of the firm that had made my gowns. As a matter of fact, I designed them all myself, and they were made in my house, under my personal direction. I never wear dresses used in one play for another, and the consequence is that I own a wardrobe that would appall you."

Miss Coghlan smiled at the dulcet souvenirs thus evoked, and I allowed her to continue her promenade on the faithful arm of her husband, John T. Sullivan.

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I can't believe that Denman Thompson had very much to do with "The Sunshine of Paradise Alley," now current at the Fourteenth Street Theatre. His name appears on the programme as coauthor with George Ryer. I prefer to place all the blame on the shoulders of that gentleman, whom I don't know. Mr. Thompson, whom I do know, must surely be innocent as a lamb.

The trouble with the play is that it has no story worth telling and nothing to justify its presentation but some electrical effects, which we saw much more convincingly at the Star Theatre a couple of seasons ago. It is impossible to feel an interest in Paradise Alley, just because it happens to be Paradise Alley. I enjoy a slummy play occasionally, but it must be either funny or vivid. Its types must be amusing (we can forgive anything if we are amused), or they must point some moral and express some truth.

In this latest alley-drama there is no attempt at anything of the sort. The people talk slang and dress grimly, but nothing they do or say causes a laugh, and they give us no entertaining insight into the life of the region they affect. Harrigan, caricatured and broadened; "Chimmie Fadden" amused and suggested; "The Sunshine of Paradise Alley" thrusts the slums in our faces, and leaves us planted there, as the French say.

Then some of the types preach, and there is nothing more fatal than preachiness. The clever dramatist allows his characters to act the lessons that he deems it desirable to teach. The clumsy one allows them to talk. That is why I don't believe that Denman Thompson had much to do with "Paradise Alley." In "The Old Homestead" he gave us a sweet poetic lesson that came to us imperceptibly. The hand of the artist was apparent everywhere. In the Fourteenth Street Theatre play it is the hand of the blacksmith, of the plumber that we see.

The cheap struggle for effect by means of the prayer of the little children deceived nobody. It was all so absurdly obvious—the prayer, the firelight, the snowstorm, and the slow music. The playwright who depends upon such methods as these is irritating and behind the times. If Mr. Ryer has ever visited Paradise Alley, which I don't believe, he must have gone there with his eyes shut, or he would have found some more characteristic incidents to portray than those to which he has introduced us. Atmosphere is what he lacked. His series of pictures might have been arranged on a toboggan at Coney Island, or on the piazza of some Summer hotel.

Harrigan made a study of low life, and he discovered a great deal that we never knew before. Harrigan was the Dickens of the New York slums, and though he caricatured and exaggerated, and sacrificed a great deal of truth to entertainment, there was a sentiment of veracity in everything that he gave us. Everybody felt that he knew the regions that he pictured, not from books and newspapers, but from personal knowledge directly acquired.

The slums will never be popular again until Harrigan returns to us, and he apparently feels that he has gone as far as he can go. He need fear no rivalry. Harrigan devoted a lifetime to one subject, and nobody else has done as much. He became discouraged and he left us. It is idle for other less experienced people to dally with the slum play. We want Harrigan or nobody.

"The Sunshine of Paradise Alley" left my mind absolutely blank. I cannot recall one character in it without an effort. Sunshine herself had no saving grace, and the various toughs were simply old types revamped, and revamped very badly.

The season, though dead, has not yet been gathered to its forefathers. Irving says farewell on Friday night, and Sarah steps in for a brief week at Abbey's Theatre on the ensuing Saturday. The tragedienne, however, will not enjoy this final week. "Izeyl," with its Buddhist agony, is not a felicitous tribute to May, and Sarah's excuse for a novelty, in the shape of the woful and highly seasoned "Femme de Claude," can hardly hope to attract much attention.

ALAN DALE.